

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 151594
ORIGIN EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PA-01 ICA-11 /025 R

DRAFTED BY EUR/SOV:MJHENDERSON:PJP
APPROVED BY EUR:WLUERS
EUR/SOV:SMCCALL

-----064994 150449Z /21

R 142337Z JUN 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 151594

E.O. 11652: GDS

AGS: SREL, UR, US

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE SOVIET INVITATION TO BILLY GRAHAM

REF: MOSCOW 2430

1. DR. WALTER H. SMITH, VICE PRESIDENT FOR INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES AND REV. ALEXANDER S. HARASZTI, CONSULTANT ON EAST EUROPEAN AFFAIRS, OF THE BILLY GRAHAM EVANGELISTIC ASSOCIATION VISITED EUR/SOV ON JUNE 9 TO DISCUSS AN INVITATION THE ASSOCIATION HAS RECEIVED FROM THE ALL-UNION COUNCIL OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS-BAPTISTS (AUCECB) FOR SMITH AND HARASZTI TO VISIT MOSCOW LATER THIS YEAR. THE INVITATION, GIVEN FIRST DURING DR. GRAHAM'S VISIT TO HUNGARY, WAS RENEWED BY AUCECB OFFICIALS BYCHKOV AND ZHIDKOV EARLY THIS YEAR (REFTEL). THE PURPOSE OF A SMITH/HARASZTI VISIT WOULD BE TO DISCUSS A FORMAL GOVERNMENT SANCTIONED INVITATION FROM THE AUCECB TO GRAHAM FOR AN EVANGELICAL VISIT TO THE USSR.

2. SMITH AND HARASZTI SAID THEY ARE HOPEFUL THAT GRAHAM
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WILL BE ABLE TO EXTEND HIS EAST EUROPEAN MINISTRY TO THE SOVIET UNION, WHICH THEY SEE AS AN ATTRACTIVE AREA FOR EVANGELISM. AT THE SAME TIME, THEY APPEARED CAUTIOUS AND CONCERNED ABOUT THE USES TO WHICH A GRAHAM VISIT MAY BE PUT BY THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT AND THE EFFECT SUCH A VISIT

MAY HAVE ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ESTABLISHED AND UNREGIS-

TERED CONGREGATIONS. SMITH AND HARASZTI ALSO NOTED THAT THE RESULTS OF GRAHAMS VISIT TO POLAND THIS FALL WILL BE INFLUENTIAL IN HIS DECISION TO PUSH AHEAD OR NOT WITH A SOVIET VISIT. GRAHAM IS ALSO AWARE OF TIMING CONSTRAINTS IMPOSED BY THE MOSCOW OLYMPICS; HE WOULD NOT EXPECT TO BE IN THE SOVIET UNION UNTIL 1981 AT THE EARLIEST.

3. SMITH AND HARASZTI MET LATER WITH SOVIET EMBASSY FIRST SECRETARY IKAR ZAVRAZHNOV WITH WHOM THEY HAD CORRESPONDED REGARDING THEIR DEALINGS WITH AUCECB.

4. DEPARTMENT WILL KEEP EMBASSY INFORMED AS WE LEARN MORE OF THIS. CHRISTOPHER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: VISITS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE151594
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: MJHENDERSON:PJP
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780249-0744
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780658/aaaabxuk.tel
Line Count: 75
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 22a96088-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 MOSCOW 2430
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2345399
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: POSSIBLE SOVIET INVITATION TO BILLY GRAHAM
TAGS: SREF, US, UR, (GRAHAM, BILLY)
To: MOSCOW
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/22a96088-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014